



AAC Publications

Fitz Roy massif, “Fitz Traverse”

Argentina-Chile, Chaltén Massif

In mid-February, Tommy Caldwell and I were lucky enough to get a five-day weather window in Patagonia. We took advantage of it by climbing the “Fitz Traverse,” a complete traverse of the Fitz Roy Massif. From north to south, the major summits on the traverse include Aguja Guillaumet, Aguja Mermoz, Cerro Fitz Roy, Aguja Poincenot, Aguja Rafael Juárez, Aguja Saint-Exúpery, and Aguja de l’S.

This was my first real climb in Patagonia, and I have to say it was one of the most incredible climbing experiences of my life. One of the highlights was the fact that there was a full or nearly full moon for the entire traverse, and every night the glaciers would glow around us, staying light until dawn. We kept calling it an extremely scenic backpacking trip, going camping on the most amazing mountains in the world.

We started at 9:45 a.m. on February 12 from Paso Guillaumet, and even though the weather was perfect, conditions were far from ideal. Our progress up Guillaumet’s Brenner-Moschioni Route was slowed by icy cracks and general snowiness, and the Argentina Route up Mermoz, our second peak, was a wet and icy nightmare—at least for me, since I have no experience with those kinds of conditions. We bivied that night between the summit of Mermoz and Aguja Val Biois.

On day two we traversed to the base of the North Pillar (a.k.a Goretta Pillar) of Fitz Roy and climbed the Casarotto Route with the Kearney-Knight variation in three glorious pitches by simul-climbing. The top of the pillar was a snowy, rime-covered mess. I thought we might be on Cerro Torre for a minute. Tommy led us the rest of the way to the summit of Fitz Roy, a heroic effort that involved aiding a river of freezing water in the dark. It was the only section on the traverse that I jugged, super-grateful I didn’t have to climb the icy abomination of a headwall. We camped that night on the summit of Fitz Roy. The next morning we ran into Whit Magro on the summit, and he helped us find the descent rappels down the Franco-Argentine Route.

We then continued simul-climbing across to Aguja Poincenot, possibly climbing an unclimbed spire along the way between Punta M&M and Aguja Kakito. This provided access to the Potter-Davis Route on Aguja Poincenot, which we short-fixed to the summit. We camped that night on top of Poincenot, hopeful that we would finish out the three remaining and smaller summits the next day. The descent off of Poincenot was one of the big unknowns of the whole traverse because it involved reversing a rarely climbed 1,000’ big wall, but thankfully, after a lot of anxiety and searching, we managed to find the rappels down Judgment Day, nailing it on our first try.

Once at the Col SUSAT, we simul-climbed the Piola-Anker Route on Aguja Rafael Juárez and traversed the ridge to Aguja Saint-Exúpery before getting bogged down rappelling the Austríaca Route on Exúpery. We were forced to do the many rappels with just a 38m rope, as we had developed a core-shot near the middle of the lead rope, and it was too windy to use our tag line. In all we did over 20 short rappels with the remnants of our lead line before the wind calmed down and we could use our tag line again. When it got dark we decided to bivy that night below Aguja de l’S, the last spire on the traverse. It seemed prudent to rest and climb it in the light so we wouldn’t botch the route finding or hurt ourselves crossing the glacier during the night. Needless to say we were very tired by this point. On February 16, we simul-climbed the north ridge Aguja de l’S in about a half-hour in our gloves and approach shoes, a bit of an anticlimactic finish to this amazing traverse.

As we summited the weather window quickly closed and the wind became nuclear. We rappelled and staggered across the glacier back to town, much worse for the wear after five days out. I had even developed snow-blindness. It took two days of full bed rest before we even considered trying to move around or get out of the house. It was quite the traverse. I can't recall all the exact stats off-hand, but anyone can look up a photo of the Fitz Roy skyline to get a sense of the scale. It's a lot of climbing.

[Editor's note: In all, Caldwell and Honnold climbed over 5km of ridge-line, with nearly 4,000m of vertical gain, and with difficulties up to 5.11d C1 65°. They simul-climbed throughout the majority of the traverse, reducing the 20-pitch North Pillar of Fitz Roy to a mere three pitches. The pair climbed Fitz Roy and Aguja Poincenot in rock shoes but did everything else wearing approach shoes.]

Alex Honnold, USA, with additional information from Rolando Garibotti

Images



The skyline of the Fitz Roy massif, viewed from the east side. The Fitz Traverse, as completed by Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold, is shown. The duo started on the right and ended on the left.

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